

VZCZCXRO3547  
OO RUEHLH RUEHPW  
DE RUEHIL #3627/01 3231031  
ZNY SSSSS ZZH  
O 181031Z NOV 08  
FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0217  
INFO RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 9412  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 9101  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 4039  
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY 0626  
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY 6358  
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR PRIORITY 5211  
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY  
RHWSMRC/USCINCCENT MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY  
RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 ISLAMABAD 003627

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/13/2018  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [MOPS](#) [PK](#)  
SUBJECT: FATA UPDATE - 13 NOVEMBER 2008

REF: (A) ISLAMABAD 3348 (B) ISLAMABAD 3332 (C)  
PESHAWAR 505

Classified By: Anne W. Patterson for reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Pakistani military and Frontier Corps have made progress in clearing the main north-south corridor in Bajaur and forces are poised to move into Mohmand Agency to begin operations. The latest attack on the Salarzai tribe served to underscore the need for adequate post-conflict security so as to not undercut gains made through the military campaign. End Summary.

PAKISTANI MILITARY STILL FIGHTING IN BAJAUR  
-----

¶2. (C) The Pakistani military and Frontier Corps is continuing efforts to control the main road and secure the main towns in Bajaur. Over the past week they have been focusing on the area around Lowi Sam, and are hoping to move into Nawagai (on the border between Bajaur and Mohmand Agencies) in the coming days. Pakistani military contacts have said that securing the main lines of communication and the major towns of Bajaur was their goal. Clearing the valleys which run toward the Afghan border would be left either for the local tribes to do or for military/Frontier Corps operations at some later date. (Comment: Some Peshawar contacts have expressed concern that the militants have already vacated the valleys for the mountains where the lashkars and the military are less likely to pursue them. End Comment.)

¶3. (C) Security forces have been generally successful in clearing the main north-south corridor, and they have left some Frontier Corps checkpoints behind, as the main force moved south. USAID Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) implementers report that life is beginning to return to normal in the Agency capital of Khar. The Political Agent is working from his office there, and a cash-for-work project to clean up the town began this week. However, militants retain the ability to strike, especially in the more remote areas (see para 4 below, on the recent attack on a Salarzai tribal jirga November 6.)

SOME SETBACKS ON THE SECURITY FRONT  
-----

¶4. (S) The Salarzai tribe, which was one of the first to raise a lashkar (tribal militia) against militants, suffered a serious blow November 6. A tribal jirga called to discuss

plans for combating militants in the area was attacked and more than 20 people were killed, including several of the tribe's senior leaders (Ref C). There were conflicting reports from the FATA Secretariat and the Frontier Corps on whether the attack was the result of a suicide bomber or a remote-controlled device -- a tactic not frequently seen in Pakistan. (Note - most attacks have been either individuals wearing suicide vests or vehicle borne improvised explosive devices (VBIEDs). End note). Someone purporting to represent Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan claimed responsibility.

15. (SBU) Separately, press reports that the local administration of Orakzai Agency has made a deal and freed four of Baitullah Mehsud's men (Maulvi Rafiuddin and three others) on November 5 in exchange for ten security personnel who had been kidnapped. The arrest of the four in July was met with retaliation from taliban militants, who initially besieged the police station, and then kidnapped a number of civilians and security personnel, including police recruits. Three of those kidnapped were executed, and the taliban continued to demand the release of Rafiuddin. When a one-week deadline was not met, they killed two police recruits; shortly thereafter the local government agreed to release the four militants.

#### TAKING THE FIGHT TO MOHMAND SOON?

-----

16. (S) Frontier Corps Commander Major General Tariq Khan has regularly briefed U.S. officials that his immediate objective

ISLAMABAD 00003627 002 OF 003

would be to clear the main arteries of Bajaur, and then move to Mohmand Agency, if necessary. First, he said, he would give the local tribes the opportunity to take action on their own. If that was not successful, he would move the Frontier Corps into the Agency. Pakistani officials now tell us the Mohmand operation will begin in the next four to five days, as soon as an additional 900 troops arrive.

17. (S) Military contacts say they plan a different approach from that used in Bajaur, which was a very heavy-handed operation which relied on aerial bombing sorties and tanks rolling through villages. In the village of Lowi Sam, where an extensive tunnel system was found, Pakistani security forces razed every house connected to a tunnel, resulting in the destruction of perhaps eighty percent of the buildings in the town.

18. (S) In Mohmand, the Pakistani military hopes to do cordon and search operations based on intelligence, and targeting known and suspected insurgent locations. Their plan involves moving simultaneously from north and south, in order to limit insurgents' ability to escape. The Pakistani Military has sought cooperation from U.S. forces in Afghanistan to ensure militants are not able to relocate to sites across the border.

19. (U) On November 4-5, authorities dropped leaflets in areas of Mohmand Agency adjacent to Peshawar calling on the people to follow the example of tribes in Bajaur, Darra Adam Khel, and Orakzai and raise lashkars against the militants. Press reports that a curfew has been imposed and all government and educational institutions have been closed, and the main road between Mohmand and Bajaur has been closed. The press also reports that people have interpreted the leaflets to mean that military action is imminent, and they are beginning to move out of the Agency. Embassy is currently working to assess how many people may be leaving, and where they are going.

110. (SBU) Militants may be trying to get out ahead of the military action. Press reports that on November 7, they attacked several police and Frontier Corps posts and have destroyed two bridges. An OTI team in the area confirms

reports of attacks on the police checkpoint at the Pandali-Ghalanai road intersection and the destruction of at least one bridge, as well as the imposition of a curfew.

COMMENT

¶11. (C) The persistence of the Pakistani military and the Frontier Corps, signaled by their plan to continue into Mohmand, is encouraging -- as is their apparent willingness to adjust tactics to better achieve their goal of defeating militants while not alienating the local populace. That said, there is still a way to go on civil-military planning and a coherent public information strategy. The leaflet drop in Mohmand does not appear to have been coordinated with any of the agencies providing aid for IDPs. And although camp management and provision of assistance to those staying with families have improved, aid agencies are likely to be caught playing catch-up if large numbers of people begin to move out of Mohmand.

¶12. (C) The Pakistani military engagement in Mohmand will be an important criteria for measuring the commitment of Islamabad to fighting the militants. Equally important will be the reaction of the tribes to the predictable retaliation from militants. We remain concerned that neither the Frontier Corps nor the local administrations have forces sufficiently manned and trained to execute the "hold" piece of a "clear, hold, and build" strategy. The decision by the local administration in Orakzai to release militants this week likely reflects a lack of confidence in the Pakistani government's ability to defend the tribes over the long term. No one has been held to account for the October 7 attack on a jirga assembled in Orakzai to discuss raising a lashkar against militants; over 100 people were killed. And a Frontier Corps attempt to rescue some of those kidnapped after Maulvi Rafiuddin was arrested failed -- and resulted in 13 FC being killed in action.

ISLAMABAD 00003627 003 OF 003

¶13. (C) The latest attack on the Salarzai tribe in early November demands a government response, to signal to the population throughout the FATA that they are not being asked to take on the militants alone. We will be stressing to GoP interlocutors the importance of quickly investigating these attacks and bringing those responsible to justice. We are attempting, through our supplemental request and the refocusing of some of our assistance funding, to improve the ability of local law enforcement agencies to ensure adequate security, as military operations conclude. But these efforts will take time to bear fruit, and there is a high risk in the interim that the militants will be able to undercut gains made in the military campaign, and tip the balance back in their favor.

PATTERSON